

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MANAMA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM IMMEDIATE
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AMEMBASSY RABAT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BONN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DOHA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

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EXDIS, ROME ALSO FOR VATICAN OFFICE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, MOPS, UNSC, PINT, LE, IS, SY

SUBJECT: LEBANON: CONTINUING EFFORTS TO DEFUSE THE

CRISIS

REF: STATE 171142

1. REFTEL DESCRIBED STEPS WE HAVE BEEN TAKING TO CALM DOWN THE SITUATION CAUSED BY THE FIGHTING IN BEIRUT. DRAWING ON REFTEL AND THIS MESSAGE FOR GUIDANCE, WE WANT ADDRESSEES TO EXCHANGE VIEWS WITH HOST GOVERNMENTS, EXPLAIN WHAT WE ARE DOING, AND SEEK THEIR IDEAS. WE HOPE THAT THEY WILL TAKE STEPS PARALLELING OURS WITH THE ISRAELIS, SYRIANS, THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT, CHRISTIAN RIGHTIST LEADERS, OTHER LEBANESE POLITICIANS, LEBANESE RELIGIOUS LEADERS, THE PALESTINIANS OR, IN SHORT, WHEREVER THEY HAVE INFLUENCE. USUN SHOULD DO THE SAME WITH APPROPRIATE MISSIONS IN NEW YORK. PLEASE OFFER APPRECIATION FOR EFFORTS ALREADY MADE. THE EC-9 STATEMENT OF JULY 6, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS EXCELLENT.

2. OUTLINED BELOW ARE MAJOR LINES OF ACTION WE ARE PURSUING AND WHICH WE BELIEVE APPROPRIATE HOST GOVERNMENTS COULD ALSO ASSIST, DEPENDING ON INDIVIDUAL SITUATIONS AND RELATIONS WITH THE KEY PARTIES:

3. FORESTALLING THE RESIGNATION OF SARKIS:

WHILE PRESIDENT SARKIS HAS NOW POSTPONED HIS DECISION TO
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RESIGN, WE SUSPECT HE MAY WANT TO DO SO SOONER OR LATER. HIS THREAT TO RESIGN SHOULD NOT BE SEEN AS A GAMBIT TO GAIN TIME OR SUPPORT. IN OUR EMBASSY'S VIEW, HE FEELS HIMSELF BUFFETTED BY FORCES BEYOND HIS CONTROL. TO CARRY OUT ACTUAL RESIGNATION, SARKIS WOULD HAVE TO DESIGNATE AN INTERIM PRIME MINISTER (A CHRISTIAN) TO GOVERN AN INTERIM PERIOD UNTIL A NEW PRESIDENT IS ELECTED BY PARLIAMENT. SARKIS MAY HAVE ALREADY ENCOUNTERED DIFFICULTY IN FINDING SOMEONE TO ACCEPT SUCH A DIFFICULT ROLE AT THIS TIME, AND THIS COULD DELAY HIS RESIGNATION.

4. KEEPING SARKIS IN THE PRESIDENCY IS IMPORTANT FOR SEVERAL REASONS. THE PRESIDENCY IS THE SYMBOL OF UNITY AND SOVEREIGNTY IN LEBANON. HOWEVER WEAK THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IS NOW, IT IS ALSO THE MANIFESTATION OF LEGITIMACY AND CONSTITUTIONALITY IN A COUNTRY WHERE FACTIONS AND GROUPINGS ARE COMPETING FOR REAL POWER. OUR LONG-RANGE GOAL--WHICH WE BELIEVE OTHER GOVERNMENTS WOULD AGREE IS DESIRABLE--IS THAT A LEGITIMATE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT REBUILD NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING ITS ARMY, AND EXTEND ITS AUTHORITY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY IN A WAY THAT WILL AFFORD SECURITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOR

ALL LEBANESE COMMUNITIES AND BRING INDIVIDUAL FACTIONS AND THE PROXY GROUPS OF OTHER GOVERNMENTS UNDER CONTROL. THE INVOLVEMENT OF SARKIS HIMSELF IN NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS AND THE SYRIANS FOR RESOLUTION OF THE CURRENT DIFFICULTY IS ESSENTIAL. THE PRINCIPAL REASON FOR SEEING TO IT THAT HE REMAINS IN OFFICE, AT LEAST UNTIL A SANER SITUATION BEGINS TO PREVAIL, IS THAT THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS RESIGNATION WOULD BE SO UNPREDICTABLE. NOT TO BE RULED OUT IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT IT COULD SEND LEBANON OVER THE BRINK INTO CHAOS AND RENEWED CIVIL CONFLICT, IN WHICH THE SYRIANS WOULD BE INVOLVED AND EVENTUALLY THE ISRAELIS. ALL THESE ARE REASONS ENOUGH TO ADVISE SARKIS TO STAY IN OFFICE.

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5. IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING THE CEASEFIRE:

THE CEASEFIRE MUST HOLD NOT SIMPLY TO ALLOW MATTERS TO RETURN TO THE UNEASY STATUS QUO ANTE. THE CEASEFIRE MUST HOLD LONG ENOUGH FOR THE PARTIES TO NEGOTIATE A NEW ARRANGEMENT WHICH MIGHT MINIMIZE THE CHANCES FOR ANY NEW ERUPTIONS OF FIGHTING. WE HAVE PRESENTED TO THE SYRIANS SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS UNDER WHICH THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS IN BEIRUT MIGHT BE REDUCED IN STRENGTH AND VISIBILITY WHILE THEIR SECURITY ROLE IS PERFORMED BY

LEBANESE GOVERNMENT POLICE AND MILITARY FORCES. AT THE SAME TIME, SYRIAN AND OTHER ADF FORCES MIGHT BE REPOSITIONED SOMEWHAT DISTANT FROM CHRISTIAN AREA FLASH-POINTS. WE MAY BE OFFERING OTHER IDEAS, BUT CLEARLY A COMPROMISE ARRANGEMENT WILL BE EXCEEDINGLY DIFFICULT TO NEGOTIATE. IT WILL CERTAINLY REQUIRE TIME.

6. CONSEQUENTLY, ALL GOVERNMENTS HAVING CONTACTS OR INFLUENCE WITH THE CHRISTIAN RIGHTIST LEADERS AND THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD URGE RESTRAINT AND AN AVOIDANCE OF PROVOCATIONS SO THAT TIME IS GAINED FOR A FUTURE ARRANGEMENT TO DEVELOP.

7. THE ISRAELI ROLE:

A MAJOR COMPLICATION IS THAT CERTAIN CHRISTIAN RIGHTIST LEADERS--BUT NOT ALL--HAVE APPEARED FAR TOO WILLING TO RISK FIGHTING AGAINST THE SUPERIOR SYRIAN FORCES BECAUSE THEY SENSE THAT ISRAEL WOULD COME TO THEIR RESCUE IF HEAVY SLAUGHTER OF THE CHRISTIANS BEGAN TO OCCUR. THE DANGER STEMMING FROM MISCALCULATIONS AMONG THE VARIOUS QUARTERS IS OBVIOUS TO ALL. WE HAVE

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REGULARLY COUNSELLED THE ISRAELIS TO USE THEIR INFLUENCE WITH THEIR CONTACTS IN LEBANON IN A WAY THAT WOULD FORESTALL ANY RIGHTIST CHRISTIAN PROVOCATIONS OF THE SYRIAN FORCES. IN ADDITION, WHILE WE RECOGNIZE ISRAEL'S CONCERN FOR THE WELL-BEING AND SECURITY OF LEBANON'S CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, WE ALSO HAVE POINTED OUT TO ISRAEL THE DANGERS OF ESCALATION IF ISRAEL BECAME MORE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE PRESENT SITUATION. VANCE

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